DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 757 TM 030 409

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TITLE Fostering Research by Female Graduate Students through Mentoring.

PUB DATE 1999-11-00

NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Point Clear, AL, November 16-19, 1999).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Females; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Mentors; Participation; *Research; Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

During the summer semester of 1997, six female graduate students participated in a qualitative research methods course specifically designed to facilitate peer and instructor research mentoring. This study explored the experiences of the six students as related to the qualitative research course and the attitudes of these women about graduate scholarship and constructed a theoretical framework on female research mentoring. Data collection involved telephone interviews the semester following the course, e-mail interviews a year later, and a follow-up focus group session with 5 of the 6 graduate students 18 months after the class. The theoretical framework developed from the findings identified four constructs related to research by female graduate students. These included: (1) overarching research barriers; (2) time management concerns; (3) perceived gender differences that influence research production; and (4) obstacles to research because of family commitments. The framework also identified the mentoring solutions for each of the constructs and the benefits of the qualitative research class as related to those solutions. (Contains 1 figure and 10 references.) (Author/SLD)

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ED 435 757

Running head: Mentoring Female Graduate Students

Fostering Research by Female Graduate Students Through Mentoring

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, November 17-19, 1999, Point Clear, Alabama

This paper will be submitted to Initiatives: Journal for the National Association for Women in Education.

TM030409

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Abstract

Evidence in the literature suggests that women are less likely than men to be involved in research activities (Chronister, Gansndeer, Harper, & Baldwin, 1997). Feminist researchers postulate that an increase in research mentoring might encourage more women to participate in research activities (Leibenluft, Dial, Haviland, & Pincus, 1993). Furthermore, researchers argue that female graduate students have different mentoring needs as compared with their male peers.

During the summer semester 1997, six female graduate students participated in a qualitative research methods course specifically designed to facilitate peer and instructor research mentoring. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of the six female graduate students as related to the qualitative research course, to explore the attitudes of these women about graduate scholarship and research, and to construct a theoretical framework on female research mentoring.

The data collection phase of the research included three methods: (a) telephone interviews the semester following the class, (b) e-mail interviews one year later, and (c) a follow-up focus group session with five of the six graduate students 18 months after the class. The researchers used a content analysis protocol by first manually coding the data, then developing the attitude themes and patterns, and, finally, constructing the framework from the attitude patterns. A "member check" of the resulting theoretical display was conducted by participants in the study and by female graduate students not enrolled in the course.

The theoretical framework identified four constructs related to research by female graduate students. Those constructs included (a) overarching research barriers, (b) time management concerns, (c) perceived gender differences that influence research production, and (d) obstacles to research due to family commitments. The framework also identified the mentoring solutions for each of the constructs and the benefits of the qualitative research class as related to those solutions.

According to extant literature, women in academe are less likely to be involved in research and writing activities as compared with their male colleagues. Based on findings from past research, this diminished productivity for females as compared with male peers cuts across disciplines, professorate rank, and institutional classification (Chronister, Gansneder, Harper, and Baldwin, 1997).

For example, research targeting academic psychiatrists found that women were less likely than men to have had research training, to mentor research trainees, and to have been principal investigators on grants (Leibenluft, Dial, Haviland, & Pincus, 1993). Utilizing data from the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, Chronister, Gansneder, Harper, and Baldwin (1997) found that male faculty had higher rates of productivity for refereed articles, books and chapters, and book reviews as compared with women. They also found that the average number of career publications for males was more than twice the number for females. In another study, male and female members of the American College Personnel Association were compared, and it was discovered that, while male and female members expressed similar interest in research and writing, women were contributing less to the literature than men (Nicoloff & Forrest, 1988)

In the past, researchers have claimed that gender differences in research activities can be explained by social and psychological differences between men and women. For example, women have been purported to have greater family responsibilities, less interest in research than teaching, less competitive personalities, and a tendency to work at other than research universities (Bently & Blackburn, 1992). However, results from the study of members of the American College Personnel Association suggested that other factors may prevent some women from becoming as productive in research and writing as their

male counterparts. In that study, women more often than men reported a lack of support in their work environment for research and writing; fewer mentoring experiences that prepared them for this work; and a lack of confidence and expertise needed to pursue research and writing (Nicoloff & Forrest, 1988).

Several researchers, including feminist researchers, have suggested that an increase in appropriate mentoring experiences and hands-on research opportunities might encourage more women to participate in research activities. In fact, mentoring has been a frequently cited remedy for the problem of gender disparity in a variety of school and work settings (Bruce, 1995; Jacobi, 1991; Leibenluft, Dial, Haviland, & Pincus, 1993). It has also been suggested that research mentoring should begin while women are still graduate students and training for the professorate. Furthermore, female faculty should continue mentoring relationships throughout their professional lives.

Whereas mentoring maybe a viable solution to this gender-based research dichotomy, some authors have suggested that women may have such divergent mentoring needs as compared with men that the mentoring relationship itself must be examined. Some have even suggested that this divergence may create a situation in which women maybe best mentored by other women (Gilligan, 1982; Jacobi, 1991; Shakeshaft, Gilligan, & Pierce, 1984). For example, gender socialization differences between a male mentor and a female may create a mismatch in teaching and learning styles, making it more likely that the educational needs of the female will go unmet (Leibenluft, Dial, Haviland, & Pincus, 1993).

Also important to remember is that female graduate students or faculty members may not only derive benefits from a relationship with an "older and wiser" female

mentor, but also from relationships with their peers. In one study of female doctoral students, researchers found that female students benefit most from a combination of peer interaction and role modeling by women faculty. The peer interaction helps the student achieve a sense of competence, autonomy, and mutual respect, while the faculty role model offers encouragement and support to the student, and provides a picture of a confident and competent woman (Bruce, 1995).

With past research on female scholarship and productivity focusing on the need for research mentoring, it is reasonable to suggest that the doctoral classroom is the ideal place to design a learning experience with the purpose of preparing female scholars. With that in mind, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of six female graduate students involved in a qualitative research course designed by the instructor to foster research mentoring. A further purpose of this study was to construct a theoretical framework about the perceptions of female graduate students toward research and their ideas about research mentoring.

The Qualitative Research Methods Course

Six female graduate students participated in a qualitative research course during the first summer term in 1997. The course is a core requirement in a doctoral program and was not designed for female students only. The enrollment of all female students was purely accidental. At the outset, the goal of the instructor was to provide the graduate students with an experience that would engage both their cognitive and affective understanding of phenomenological inquiry, and to foster research through mentoring. Therefore, it was important that the students experience the inquiry process first-hand, explore their personal motivations toward, and biases about, research, and learn to work

with the instructor in a mentoring relationship.

To accomplish the course learning goals, students participated in a variety of in-class and out-of-class activities. However, two activities were of primary importance to developing a mentoring relationship to build research confidence: the hands-on research project, and presentation of the research at a regional conference. Students were required to participate in a "live" qualitative research class project. Employing a focus group method of inquiry with university administrators from a metropolitan university, the students explored the question: What evaluation criteria do metropolitan university administrators use to determine institutional effectiveness? The students were required to conduct the focus group sessions; convert the data from the transcripts into codes, attitude themes, and attitude patterns; build a theoretical framework from the data on institutional effectiveness; and write a final qualitative research report (Franklin, Boggs, Conners, Crum, Nawarat, Ramirez, & Trawick, 1997).

Students worked in pairs during this process, which facilitated the development of peer mentoring relationships. To foster instructor-to-student mentoring, the instructor also worked very closely with each student on every aspect of the research process. The instructor used class time to discuss qualitative research principles, share challenges with the extant research project, and allow students time to share their research discoveries and frustrations.

The female graduate students were also required to maintain a reflective journal during the semester. The purpose of the journal was threefold: (a) to encourage the self-exploration that is vitally important to qualitative research, (b) to encourage students to engage in reflective practice on the research process, and (c) to provide students with a

non-threatening method to vent frustrations and ask questions of the research mentor.

In addition to the required coursework, the graduate students, with encouragement from the instructor, submitted their research paper as a proposal to the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association held in Memphis, Tennessee in November 1997. The proposal was accepted, and during the fall semester, the six graduate students and the instructor presented their research at this conference. This was truly the culminating experience for these novice qualitative researchers, and an outcome of the mentoring that took place between the instructor and the students.

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of female graduate students about their willingness and ability to conduct graduate research, and their ideas concerning mentoring solutions to foster graduate research by women. Six female graduate students enrolled in a qualitative research methods course during the summer semester 1997 participated in this study. Of the six women, five were enrolled in a higher education administration doctoral program at a metropolitan university and one student was enrolled in an educational psychology and research doctoral program. Five of the six women were married. Three of the five had children ranging in age from one year to 23 years old. Four of the six women were native to the southwestern United States, one woman was an international student from Thailand, and one woman was a native of Puerto Rico but had resided in the contiguous United States for approximately five years.

A variety of qualitative research methods were used to develop a theoretical framework on the attitudes of these female graduate students toward conducting research

and their attitudes about effective research mentoring. During the spring 1998, telephone interviews were conducted with the women in this study to collect data concerning their attitudes about the qualitative research course and the teaching method employed in the course. The telephone interview was conducted by one of the female students enrolled in the qualitative research course and who served as a co-researcher for this project. One year after the qualitative research course, summer 1998, the student co-researcher contacted each of the remaining five graduate students via e-mail requesting information about their on-going mentoring relationship with the female instructor for the class, their extant research, and their enduring attitudes about the course. Finally, approximately 18 months from the completion of the qualitative research course, in December 1998, the female instructor, the graduate student co-researcher, and four of the remaining female graduate students from the course participated in a focused conversation about their graduate experiences, scholarship, and mentoring solutions.

The researchers refer to the group discussion as a "focused conversation" instead of a "focus group method of inquiry" simply because the focused conversation did not include a research moderator performing the qualitative research functions within naturalistic inquiry parameters (Krueger, 1994). It was, instead, a recorded conversation over lunch among six women sharing their frustrations and joys about graduate scholarship. The focused conversation lasted approximately two-hours and was held in the home of one of the female graduate students. Prior to attending the lunch, the women were told the nature of the lunch and the topic for discussion allowing them time to prepare their thoughts on research and mentoring.

The researchers analyzed the data from the triangulation using a content analysis protocol. They coded the data from the telephone interview, the e-mail responses, and the focused conversation into categories related to the purpose of the study. After coding the data, the researchers condensed the codes into attitude themes and patterns related to student attitudes about research, mentoring, and the benefit of the qualitative research course. From the attitude patterns, the researchers developed a theoretical framework on fostering research by female graduate students.

Two of the female graduate students in the study conducted a "member check" of the resulting theoretical framework. In addition, a female graduate student enrolled in the higher education administration doctoral program but not enrolled in the qualitative research course conducted a third member check of the framework. The researchers made minor changes to the framework based on suggestions from the member checks.

As mentioned earlier, the researchers for this study included the female instructor for the qualitative research methods course and one of the female graduate students who enrolled for the course. It can be argued that the researchers may have been too involved in the content of the research to objectively collect and analyze the data. Certainly, there is some concern related to the participation of the instructor in a data collection process with current students. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the instructor continues to serve as a dissertation chair, or on the dissertation committee, for at least five of the six female students. Furthermore, there may be some concern about one of the graduate students serving as a co-researcher. Was her voice really heard? Did she feel comfortable sharing the negatives of the class not only with her instructor but also with her instructor/co-researcher? And, finally, is it realistic to believe that the remaining

class members would feel comfortable sharing their true attitudes with a student peer who had the close ear of the instructor?

There may be some limitations to the study due to the close relationship of the researchers to the research content; however, it is important to keep in mind that the primary purpose of this research was to explore female attitudes about research and mentoring, and not to evaluate the course. It can be argued that these women had nothing to lose in sharing their concerns about research with a student peer and with the faculty member who was charged with mentoring their future dissertation experience. If nothing else, these students were in a position to communicate with their research mentor their on-going concerns about research in a non-threatening way. Furthermore, even though the student co-researcher did not have an opportunity in the telephone interview nor the e-mail interview to share her voice on the topic, she did participate fully in the focused conversation. Finally, the very philosophy informing qualitative research supports the notion of researcher as "participant" in a naturalistic inquiry process (Merriam, 1998).

Female Scholarship: A Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that emerged from the conversations with the six female graduate students contains four theoretical constructs related to female attitudes about research. The four constructs are (a) female cultural barriers to research, (b) barriers created by perceived gender differences, (c) barriers due to family commitments, and (d) time management barriers. Also included in the framework is the operational-definition of the four constructs, the mentoring solutions to the research barriers as suggested by the female graduate students, and the benefits of the teaching method in this qualitative research course as related to those mentoring solutions.

Female Cultural Barriers to Research

At first glance, the following operational definition of this theoretical construct appears to be an amalgamation of the remaining constructs. It is true that included in this theoretical construct are female attitudes concerning gender-based dichotomies in research, issues related to family commitments, and time management concerns. However, upon deeper analysis of the words spoken by these six women, it becomes evident that there is something more being said than these three constructs alone can capture; that "something" is a common thread of fear. It is a thread spun from the uniqueness of being female in a male society, a uniqueness that creates a common female culture with inherent barriers to research. It is this thread that pieces the patches of all experiences with research and scholarship into a common quilt of female truth and understanding. It is this thread of fear that comprises the operational definition of the "female culture" construct and sets this definition only slightly apart from the remaining three constructs.

In the many conversations with these women, a repeated theme in their discussions about graduate scholarship was the fear of ridicule and failure. They feared ridicule from peers and from faculty if they were not successful in research attempts. In conducting research, they believed their male colleagues had the advantage, in that, male graduate students are given much more leniency in making mistakes and the time to learn from those mistakes. As one female stated, "When men make a mistake in research they take one baby step backward. When women make a mistake they take several giant steps back." According to these women, this fear of ridicule particularly by graduate faculty prevents them from aggressively pursuing research opportunities with faculty and with

other students. They believed that, female graduate students must have a very high level of confidence in their research competence before they are willing to "stick their neck out". They feared that the tiniest misstep would provide faculty and other students with the needed evidence to demonstrate that "after all women can't do research".

These women also mentioned other reasons for not aggressively pursuing research opportunities with faculty. They discussed a fear that women who ask faculty to participate in research might be seen as being "too pushy". "You know, it's the same as inviting yourself to someone's party! You just don't do that." They believed that if faculty wanted them to participate in research, then faculty would invite them to the party. According to these women, female graduate students are not invited because many graduate faculties prefer to work with male students. They understood that male faculty might feel more comfortable in guiding male students in research. They also postulated that female graduate faculty are more willing to mentor research by males because of the implied enhanced prestige in mentoring men as compared with mentoring women.

Even with that said, these female students admitted that sometimes they avoid opportunities to work with willing faculty simply because it is "just one more thing that I have to add to my list of things to do". Female graduate students feel overwhelmed by all that they must accomplish. They fear if they say yes to a research proposal that they won't have the time to complete the project or, even worse, they won't have the time to give their best. On the other hand, they fear saying no to a professor because they worry that the professor might think negatively of them for their unwillingness to participate. Consequently, many of the women talked of examples when they had avoided contact with faculty for fear that a research proposal might be offered.

With all of these female-culturally-related barriers to research, women talked of feeling disconnected from the research component of the graduate process. They believed there are few opportunities for female graduate students to truly succeed in research. They feel disconnected because of their perception of faculty bias about working with female students, they feel disconnected because of time constraints, and they feel disconnected because of their lack of confidence in their research competence.

Barriers Created by Perceived Gender Differences

Closely related to cultural barriers is the idea of perceived gender differences. For these female graduate students differences do exist between them and their male counterparts that serve as obstacles to research success. As mentioned earlier, female students recognize an unspoken preference of male faculty in mentoring male students. The women in this study labeled this preference as the "male privilege". Because the majority of graduate faculty are male and because females believe that male students are accepted more easily by male faculty, these female students hypothesized that male graduate students have a "ready made privilege" in being chosen to participate in research. It is also this male privilege that allows the male more leniency in making research errors as compared with female students.

According to the women in this study, men also enjoy more freedom to pursue the graduate degree than do women. This male freedom is a result of the ability of men to separate themselves from their different life roles. These women postulated that men know how to focus their time and energy on one project at a time. While female graduate students must constantly juggle between career, home, extended family, and graduate studies, male graduate students have support networks in place to divert the

responsibilities of career (secretary), home (wife), and extended family (sister and mother) so that they can focus on the rigors of graduate scholarship. The women in this study expressed emotions of envy, jealousy, and resentment over the perceived privilege and freedom of their male peers.

In the opinion of these female students, male privilege and male freedom promotes male risk-taking. These women readily admitted that their male counterparts are much willing to take risks while pursuing additional research opportunities or other graduate activities. They admitted that they sometimes avoid opportunities to stretch themselves academically, but they excused their behavior in terms of the privilege and freedom of their male student colleagues. Contrary to that admitted tendency to "excuse" their lack of aggressiveness in pursuing research opportunities, these women shared examples in their academic career in which they believed that they had to do just a little bit more than their male peers, or do things just a little bit better, to remain competitive. It was their hypothesis that women in American society are still not given due respect for their skills and competencies, are not given the same level of credibility as men, and are ignored regardless of academic and life experiences. They further hypothesized that these same gender differences in society are evident in graduate programs.

Barriers Due to Family Commitments

Perhaps the most frequently discussed gender difference and barrier to research, were the family commitments, which simultaneously, challenge and uplift these women. Repeatedly, these women talked of constantly "feeling guilty about the choices I make. Women must always make choices". They felt guilty when they did not work with faculty or their peers on the latest research project because they feared they were missing

an important component of graduate scholarship. On the other hand, they felt guilty if they volunteered for extra research work because of the time away from family, work, and friends.

These female graduate students also worried about "overshadowing" their mate with their successes. Those female students whose mates were not involved in professional, white-collar jobs or who had not successfully earned a baccalaureate or master's degree, worried that their success with a doctorate degree would make their mate's accomplishments seem small in comparison. For those in this study who were not yet married, they talked of the importance to them of finding a mate with a comparable academic experience so that the woman could feel comfortable pursuing her academic success. Not only were these women concerned about overshadowing their mate, but their also shared examples in which the jealousy of their mate toward their success created family tension and conflict.

The women in this study talked of the challenge of family opposition to their pursuit of the degree. They shared experiences in which their mate or their children, or both, would place demands on them to either finish the degree quickly or to drop out of the graduate program completely. They talked of husbands who strongly encouraged them to study only during the week constantly reminding them that the "weekend was family time". These women shared frustrations with some extended family members who would chide the female student for taking time away from her family to pursue such a frivolous activity as pursuing a graduate degree.

For those women in the study who had children, they talked of the joy that children had brought to their life. However, they also discussed the additional obstacles

to success created by the presence of children in the family. Even when the father was willing to assume a larger role in parenting, these mothers felt a need to be with their children and felt guilty when they were not. As one mother said, "When I am upstairs studying and I can hear my baby crying downstairs, even if my husband is caring for the baby, I feel a very strong urge to run downstairs and hold my child. I simply can not focus on my studying." One mother admitted to the group, "Children change your priorities. Like it or not, it is that simple." Other women in the group talked of their family commitments due to aging parents, troubled siblings, or demanding spouse. According to these women, regardless of the family situation, if there is a family crisis it is the women's responsibility to interrupt her life to take care of the family. Those commitments and interruptions make the pursuit of graduate scholarship extremely difficult.

Barriers Due to Time Management Skills

Related to all that has been mentioned above, these women believed that they, more so than their male peers, need to learn successful time management skills. They expressed a frustration with their perceived inability to prioritize their life roles. They talked of a need to recognize their personal limits and learn how to set goals that accommodate those limits. They were tired of trying to "be all and do all". Finally, they discussed the importance of learning how to pursue tasks sequentially and how to complete one task before moving on to the next.

Based on their perception, it is not as important for males to learn time management skills because of the male privilege and male freedom afforded them by American culture. But, they also believed that their male peers are taught, at a very early

age, to prioritize, to set goals that are achievable, and to work sequentially. Furthermore, these women stressed the importance of learning these same time management skills to ensure their competitiveness alongside male graduate students.

Mentoring Solutions

To help women succeed in graduate research, these female graduate students talked of the importance of having a research mentor to provide nurturing guidance through the research process. They agreed that a good research mentor could be either female or male faculty as long as the mentor understood the unique needs of the female neophyte researcher. However, most of the women in this study did indicate that they felt more comfortable with a female mentor because they believed that the female mentor would better understand the female research experience. Furthermore, they talked of the need to have a female mentor who could serve as a role model for female students to observe how the role model manages diverse life roles and incorporates time for research. They did not believe that a man could serve in this capacity as a role model for women.

These female scholars discussed their need for a research mentor who challenges them to excel in research but who also provides them with a safety net when they make mistakes or falter. They shared their desire for a research "security blanket" that provides them with a sense of comfort and support as they learn the challenging nuances of positivist and post-positivist research. For these women to excel in research they believed that the research mentor must aggressively encourage women to participate in research, strive to help students achieve a level of research confidence that would result in research independence, and serve as a constant, on-going source of information about

research. Finally, these women wanted a research mentor who would walk alongside of them through the research process and who would celebrate their research successes.

Benefits of the Qualitative Research Class as Related to the Mentoring Solutions

As related to the mentoring solutions, the female graduate students discussed the benefits of the qualitative research course in which they participated. They believed that the female instructor had succeeded in designing a learning environment that encouraged a strong class bond to develop that, in turn, provided a cohesive support network for research. It was a class bond that allowed students to feel comfortable openly venting their research frustrations. This bond also facilitated peer mentoring and instruction, which some of these women found to be as valuable to them as the instructor mentoring.

According to these women, the tactical learning method employed in the class enhanced their understanding of complex qualitative research concepts and principles, and enhanced their research confidence. They valued the instructor's willingness to serve as a research guide and mentor. But, more importantly, they valued the opportunity to participate in a "cradle-to-grave" research experience that culminated with a presentation of their research at an educational research conference.

Female Scholarship: A Discussion

Related to extant literature on female scholarship, the women in this study perceived the existence of several barriers to their successful pursuit of research, including a fear of ridicule, demanding life roles, and few female role models. In further congruence with the literature, these women recognized a difference between their scholarship experiences and the experiences of their male peers. For these women, those gender-based differences were a result of "male-privilege" and "male-freedom" allowing

their male counterparts the opportunity to be more aggressive in pursuing research opportunities. Male privilege opened doors to mentoring relationships with male, and female, graduate professors that these women believed were closed to them. Male freedom offered male peers the time and energy needed to invest in a laborious research project that was outside the normal requirements of the graduate degree.

These women recognized the importance of learning exemplary time management skills to simply remain on an even keel with the privilege and freedom of male students. They understood that time management was of critical importance to them because of family conflicts, jealousies of their mate, and challenges of rearing children while working on the degree and working full-time professionally.

These women recognized the obstacles they face in scholarship productivity. For some obstacles, they understood their own short-comings and talked of their resolve to address and correct those short-comings. For some obstacles, such as gender-based research differences, they seemed to recognize and accept their role in "constantly playing catch-up with the guys". But, for most of the obstacles these women harmonized on their desire for a competent and nurturing research mentor. They talked of a research mentor who provided them with a security blanket to help them feel comfortable during the research process. A mentor who actively and aggressively encouraged them to engage in research activities and who served as a role model for success. They talked of a mentor who shared the highs and the lows, celebrating all research successes.

Based on the evidence from the conversations with these six female graduate students, the design of the qualitative research methods course was successful in helping them to find the confidence they needed to engage in on-going scholarship. These

women extolled the values of the course in providing them with a research mentoring relationship with a female graduate faculty member and a class structure that facilitated peer bonding and peer mentoring. They lauded the cradle-to-grave research experience that strengthened their understanding of research and the capstone experience of presenting their research with their mentor as a final celebration of their research success.

Conclusion

The implications of this theoretical framework are clear. Graduate professors who are interested in promoting scholarship by women must offer female graduate students a research mentoring opportunity. Furthermore, that research-mentoring experience must be designed based on the specific and unique "lived" experiences of women.

It is still debatable whether or not women require a different mentoring relationship as compared with men. The research from this study did not provide evidence to support a true dichotomy between male and female research experiences nor was that the purpose of this study. Quite simply, the voice of the male graduate student was not a part of this research. Perhaps if the study had included men, the findings would have been the same for bother genders, similar fears of ridicule, similar struggles to juggle life roles, and etc. Or, perhaps a true dichotomy in research experiences would have been found in the male and female voices.

Regardless, the importance of this study lies in the perception by women that they do need a research mentor who understands the perceived uniqueness of female scholarship. They need a research mentor who is willing to work with that uniqueness to guide women toward a productive research agenda. Therefore, the importance of this

research lies in the value of the theoretical framework in helping graduate professors understand the perceived uniqueness of female research and develop appropriate mentoring solutions.

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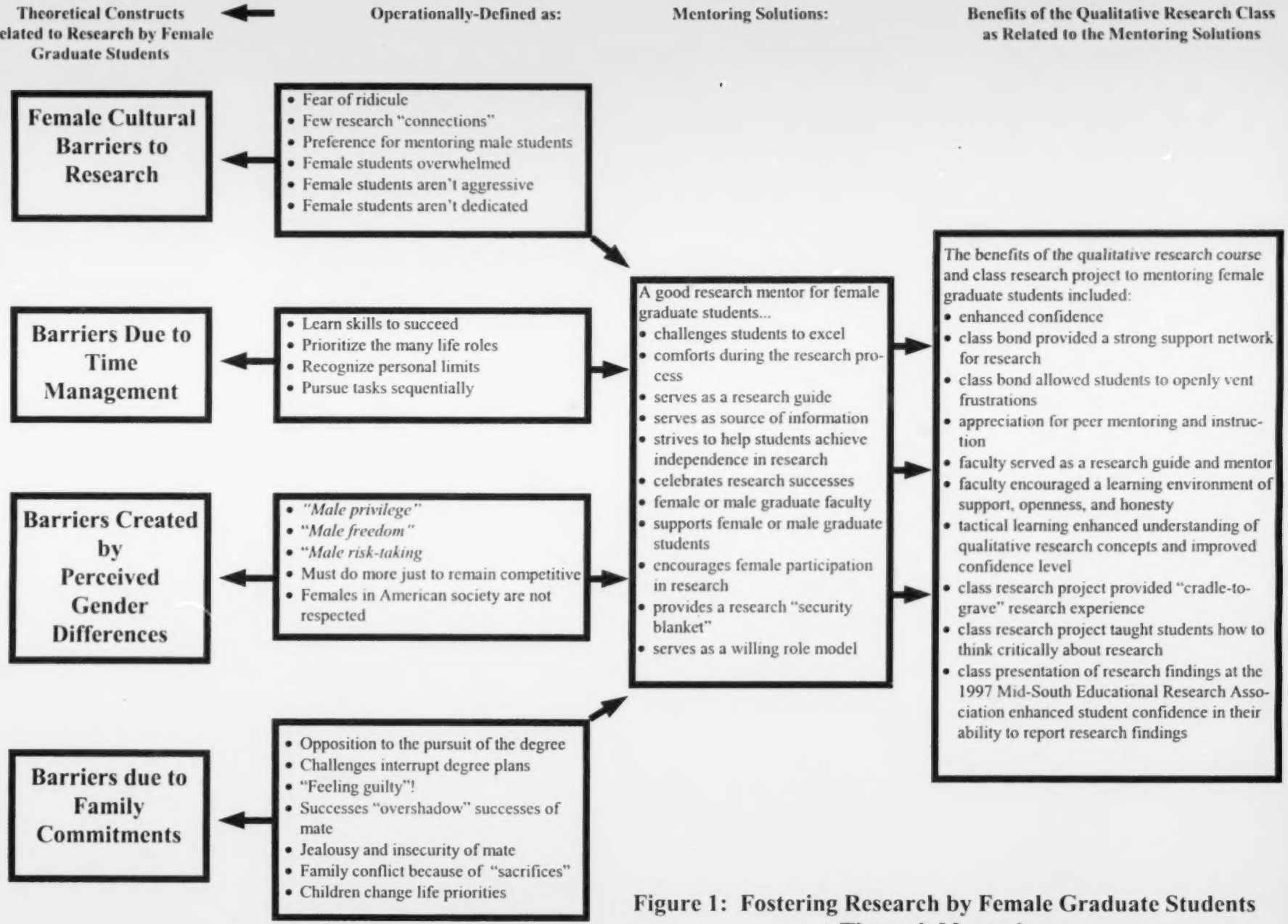
Theoretical Constructs Related to Research by Female Graduate Students
Operationally-Defined as:
Mentoring Solutions:
Benefits of the Qualitative Research Class as Related to the Mentoring Solutions
Female Cultural Barriers to Research
Fear of ridicule
Few research "connections"
Preference for mentoring male students
Female students overwhelmed
Female students aren't aggressive
Female students aren't dedicated
Barriers Due to Time Management
Learn skills to succeed
Prioritize the many life roles
Recognize personal limits
Pursue tasks sequentially
Barriers Created by Perceived Gender Differences
"Male privilege"
"Male freedom"
"Male risk-taking
Must do more just to remain competitive
Females in American society are not respected
Barriers due to Family Commitments
Opposition to the pursuit of the degree
Challenges interrupt degree plans
"Feeling guilty"!
Successes "overshadow" successes of mate
Jealousy and insecurity of mate
Family conflict because of "sacrifices"
Children change life priorities
A good research mentor for female graduate students...
challenges students to excel
comforts during the research process
serves as a research guide
serves as source of information
strives to help students achieve independence in research
celebrates research successes
female or male graduate faculty
supports female or male graduate students
encourages female participation in research
provides a research "security blanket"
serves as a willing role model
The benefits of the qualitative research course and class research project to mentoring female graduate students included:
enhanced confidence
class bond provided a strong support network for research
class bond allowed students to openly vent frustrations
appreciation for peer mentoring and instruction
faculty served as a research guide and mentor
faculty encouraged a learning environment of support, openness, and honesty
tactical learning enhanced understanding of qualitative research concepts and improved confidence level
class research project provided "cradle-to-grave" research experience
class research project taught students how to think critically about research
class presentation of research findings at the 1997 Mid-South Educational Research Association enhanced student confidence in their ability to report research findings

Figure 1: Fostering Research by Female Graduate Students Through Mentoring

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